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108 An Observer Editorial

112 *Plenty of 'Great Places' here*

By Janine Kock, Observer Editor and Publisher

Earlier this spring, Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack launched a new initiative called "Iowa Great Places."

It's not often that I agree with Governor Vilsack, but this time I do. Iowa is definitely a great place, and the people of Iowa definitely need to be challenged to use their creativity and move ahead instead of sitting around whining how we get the reputation for being the wholesome, old-fashioned "fuddy duddy" state while California and New York and all those states on the coasts get to have all the fun.

Press releases about "Great Places" use words like creativity, bold thought, innovation, entrepreneurship. Whoa.

That's some pretty heavy (and a bit scary) stuff. Anita Walker, director of the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs, which is the lead agency in charge of the initiative, made the statement, however, that creativity is not the problem. "We have more creativity than corn," she said. "What we need is confidence to turn our great ideas into great places. And we can do that with a little 'wild abandonment.'"

We see that type of thing going on even here. At meetings of the Westside Economic Development Organization, we've discussed things like a wind turbine to provide energy here, building an office building to try to attract a new business, applying for grants to continue some of the efforts currently underway, etc. But, actually getting by the "we should do that" statements and taking steps to accomplish the goals is the scary part, and we need the confidence to get started.

Governor Vilsack has challenged 18 state agencies to "collaborate with each other and the people of the state to streamline access to state programs and resources, leverage local assets, and create impact that delivers results by turning great ideas into Great Places."

A series of forums is underway across the state where decision-makers, local government and community leaders and other interested Iowans are invited to participate in discussions about the initiative. Of course, as has been Vilsack's trend, West Central Iowa is left out of the meeting schedule, but if you are up for travel, you can still head off to Des Moines for a 4-6 p.m. forum Thursday, June 2, at the State Historical Building, or attend one at Martin Ballroom, 410 Pierce Street, Sioux City, from 4-6 p.m. next Thursday, June 9.

But, even if you don't want to participate in one of the forums, we can initiate the "Great Places" attitude right here in our communities.

The initiative's press release starts off with a question: "What do you think of when you imagine a great place?" Then it goes on to give us some descriptive phrases at which we can aim to go along with the words like innovation and entrepreneurship mentioned earlier.

For example, "it radiates an energy that is almost tangible."

"It ignores boundaries such as county lines and city limits."

"Its spirit defines its existence and connects its heart and soul – a lake, arts district, history, culture – with its trails and streets and housing and parks."





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"A great place can be beautiful or coarse, high brow or street corner strange. Its power and greatness are in its ability to offer visitors and residents an experience."

What can Arcadia, Westside and Vail do to catch people's eye and make people stop instead of rushing through at their usual 50 mph in a 30 mph speed zone? (That's another editorial waiting to be written.... Where are those Highway Patrolmen when they should be stopping those speeders?)

We've got good food, we've got beautiful parks that would be excellent places for travelers to stop, we've got antiques and crafts and quilts and other interesting goodies to sell them. What we need to do is to get them to slow down long enough so that they can pull off the highway and take a look.

Maybe each one of our towns needs a billboard about a mile out of the city limits to tell travelers to prepare for a stop. Wall Drug does it – why couldn't Westside put up a big sign with "PIE \$1.50 – THE DINER" in big letters and then throw in CRAFTS and ANTIQUES, and we'll bring some of those speeders to a halt.

Then, once we've got them here, maybe they'll notice that we've got clean streets and nice housing and a great school and friendly people and everything else they've been looking for....

Hmmmm... The same thing can be repeated in each one of our towns. Some of the businesses in Arcadia have already had success with the signs they've put on the sidehill above the railroad tracks near the co-op. Why not put up a billboard advertising the cheap building lots in the Redig Addition? Why would anyone want to build anywhere else?

With the efforts to revitalize Vail as the "softball capital of Crawford County," let's show the visitors what we've got to offer and entice them to come back.

Governor Vilsack's aim is to "transform this state into a magnet for people." OK. Let's attract them to Iowa and to West Central Iowa and to Arcadia, Westside and Vail. There are so many great ideas out there just waiting for someone to think about them. Put your thinking caps on, brainstorm to your heart's content, and then let's turn some of those great ideas into reality.